

BOOK REVIEW

International Textbook of Diabetes Mellitus

2nd edition. Edited by K.G.M.M. Alberti, P. Zimmet, R.A. DeFronzo and H. Keen. Wiley, Chichester, 1997. Price £195, hardback. ISBN 0-471-93930-7.

The editors of the first edition of this huge work (now in 2 volumes, 1827 pages, 135 pages of index) declared that it should cover a 'broad panorama of diabetes'. This it certainly does. It is a huge achievement, indeed a tour de force in which world leaders in diabetes leap from the pages and which presents the state of the art at the time of writing.

The editors of this second edition remind us that there are 31 new subject headings and 80 new authors. The book includes a nice chapter on the history of diabetes and then covers every aspect of the subject in sections ranging from diagnosis, epidemiology, aetiology, management, acute disturbances, macrovascular disease, chronic and other complications to aspects of public health and

economics. It is vast in its sweep: 471 pages on biochemical pathophysiology and as many as 39 pages on diet! The bibliographies take up an excessive number of pages and should have been better reduced – the chapter on nephropathy has 518 references taking up 16 printed pages – yet remarkably up to date in some sections (even 1997 'in press'). The general appearance of the book is now perhaps a little old fashioned: there is no use of colour, little assistance from useful diagrams, few charts and relatively poor quality of photographic plates, resulting in an overall appearance that is rather less attractive than some of its competitors.

Serious specialists will need this tome on their bookshelves but it is not a book for the faint-hearted and it is not one to which clinicians will normally turn for advice on 'best clinical practice'. While some chapters, like that on diabetic ketoacidosis, could usefully be followed at the bedside, the crucial clinical coverage of important issues like the treatment of Type 2 diabetes is covered comprehensively – yet lost – in 11 chapters over 139 pages. Of course, descriptions of rare problems abound (there is a table of almost 6 pages describing genetic syndromes) which makes this type of book such a valuable source of reference.

The book is truly international not only in its authorship but also in its unique world coverage of aspects such as diet (North America to China in six chapters) and organisation and economics of care (12 chapters across vast areas from Sub-Saharan Africa to Australia and the Middle East). Whether this was the right place to include these chapters is debatable and many of the countries which might value this compendium of information could never afford to buy it.

Medical science is moving fast: areas of genetics, microbiology and biochemistry, to mention just a few, have already advanced since the publication of this book. Electronic devices bring up to date information to scientists now in a matter of seconds. Yet, the immediate availability of such comprehensive information in just two volumes with a fine index appeals to the writer of this review who, like many kindred spirits, prefers to thumb through printed pages for information before turning to media technology (assisted by sons, daughters and research fellows) where the minutiae of the latest data will supplement their contents. The authors must be congratulated on this terrific achievement.

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